

Review of *History in Our Hands: A Critical Anthology of Writings on Literature, Culture, And Politics from the 1930s*. London: Leicester University Press, 1998. 406 pp.

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Patrick Deane's *History in Our Hands: A Critical Anthology of Writings on Literature, Culture, and Politics from the 1930s*, to give the book its full title, is an exceedingly valuable contribution to anyone interested in the cross-cultural ferment in the arts and social science during the period between the World Wars. With excerpts from a carefully selected 45 contributors, the attentive reader can gain a very rounded vision of the variety of thought floating about in a period which has for too long been considered exclusively the intellectual realm of Auden, Isherwood and Spender. And while Auden and Spender are represented in Deane's anthology with five extracts, the bulk of the book is filled with writers whose works have been heard of but seldom read except by specialist scholars. Storm Jameson, Naomi Mitchison, C. Day Lewis, and David Gascoyne are examples from this group. Deane also includes essays by writers whose works are seldom connected with the 1930s such as W. B. Yeats, Vera Brittain, or T. S. Eliot. And there are essays by writers whose books have long languished in dusty second-hand book stores only to be touched by purchasers moving them aside to pick up a more readable author: Gerald Heard, Alick West, and Philippa Polson have suffered this unfortunate fate.

While editing a collection of essays in the mid-1990s for Associated University Presses concerning writers of the 1930s whom I felt were neglected, I discovered that many of the essays alluded to in the submissions I was reading were almost impossible to find outside a large reference library. Almost all the works of the writers I chose to include in *Recharting the Thirties* were largely out of print except where feminist revisions or marxist criticism had breathed life into a decaying corpse. So, then, what a joy to see essays by William Empson, C. Day Lewis, Montagu Slater, for example, there to be sampled without strain.

Further, Patrick Deane has supplied readable headnotes for each of the essays. The headnotes offer not only material about the author, but also about the passage being reproduced as well. This helps place the excerpt and the writer in a historical context. Further, the headnotes offer useful references to books on the subject and blend the inter-textual references exceedingly well. Clearly, these references will be useful for students doing courses on the 1930s, but many of the notes offer insights about the author or the work which are useful to academics as well. In the headnote to Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality*, for example, Deane reminds the reader that Samuel Hynes has pointed out that the book was written in isolation in Cornwall. Recognising the impact of this remark, the realisation that here was a mind that worked outside the London literary circles or Oxbridge academic mill makes Caudwell's early death in Spain seem a greater loss to English thought than one might have credited.

The strength of the book is in its eclectic variety of essays: from Gascoyne's Surrealism to Eliot's idea of a Christian society; from Ralph Fox's left wing vision of literature to Wyndham Lewis's fascinating discussion of Hitler's personal appearance. The book shows without a doubt the diversity of opinions clashing against one another in the 1930s and assists the reader in appreciating the intellectual struggle going on between the factions on the left, centre, and right within Great Britain.

Finally, Deane offers the reader a complete and accurate bibliography to assist students and scholars to follow up on ideas in the book. Having this anthology available will assist in making the essays behind the poetry, drama, and fiction of the thirties more accessible. With the use of this anthology, many of the generalities which are bandied about in university courses about the thirties, such as the Auden dominated thirties myth, can be dispelled and replaced with a more valid vision of the period. This book is a welcome addition for the student, the generalist teacher and the specialist alike.